



News Release

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Tool Helps Utahns Collect Family Health History

Knowing Family Health History can Save Lives

(Salt Lake City, UT) – This Thanksgiving, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) urges all Utahns to talk about their family health history. To help families discuss their health history, the UDOH has created a free toolkit. Free classes will also be held at the LDS Family History Library in Downtown Salt Lake City during November.

“When you get together with your family this Thanksgiving, use the toolkit to help you talk about your family health history,” said Jenny Johnson, Health Program Specialist with the UDOH Chronic Disease Genomics Program. “Write down what you learn and share it with your doctor and family members.”

Centerville resident Susan Curtis Quinn recognized the importance of knowing her family health history after her husband died at the age of 52 from undiagnosed hereditary heart disease. Now, she worries her children may be at increased risk of developing heart disease, too.

Now that she knows why her husband died, Quinn can help her children, who may have an increased risk of developing heart disease, live longer lives. “I remind my kids to get an annual physical, not smoke, eat right, and exercise. We each need to be aware of our family health history and be responsible for ourselves. Maybe if my husband would had done this and been more aggressive, my four children would still have a dad,” Quinn said.

“Not only can this information be life-saving for some families, but learning about your family health history can be fun too,” said Johnson.

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When collecting a family health history, gather information on close family members such as your children, parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, and aunts and uncles.

Things that are important to collect about your family members include:

- Age when the health problem started or was diagnosed
- Age and cause of death for family members who have died
- Lifestyle habits (smoker/nonsmoker, diet, weight, exercise)
- Ethnic background

Chronic health problems like heart disease, stroke, asthma, cancer, and diabetes tend to run in families. When close family members have the same health problem or develop a problem at a younger age than expected, this can increase other family members' risk of developing the problem. But the good news is, by learning about your family health history, you can make healthy choices to lower your risk.

Sharing your family health history with your health care provider is also important. Your health care provider can help you understand your risk for developing a health problem and make recommendations about lifestyle choices and screening tests to lower your risk.

To get a free Family Health History Toolkit or list of classes available, visit www.health.utah.gov/genomics or call the UDOH Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.